DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 148 746 SP 011 793

AUTHOR Perrone, Vito
TITLE Documentation: A Process for Classroom/Program Evaluation and Personal/Professional Learning.
PUB DATE Apr 77
NOTE 10p.
JOURNAL CIT Insights; v9 n7 p2-9 Apr 77

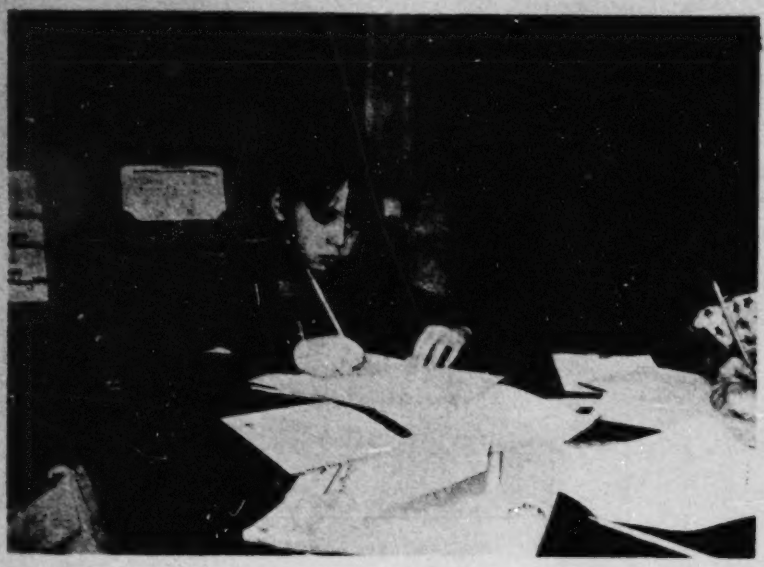
EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; *Documentation; Evaluation Methods; Interaction Process Analysis; *Learning Processes; *Personal Growth; Record Keeping; *Self Evaluation; *Teacher Evaluation; *Teaching Procedures
IDENTIFIERS *Professional Growth

ABSTRACT

Documentation of classroom processes and interaction plays two roles; it is helpful in classroom/program evaluation, and in the continuing personal and professional growth of the teacher. Documentation in the evaluation context is not primarily concerned with narrow objectives or with standardized tests, but rather seeks to determine meaning over time by recording the process of learning, the context of learning, and the content of learning. Documentation, in this respect, provides a comprehensive written record of the teaching/learning process which can be used in conjunction with other instruments for forming evaluative conclusions. As a process for personal/professional learning, documentation enables the teacher to analyze, reflect upon, and articulate basic assumptions about teaching, about teacher behavior in relation to students, parents, and colleagues, and about personal progress as a teacher. These two functions of documentation are not separate and distinct; the more collaborative they become, the more they become a base for interaction with others who are also thinking about their own teaching. (MJB)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED148746



CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA
GRAND FORKS 58201

Volume 9, Number 7
April 1977

Documentation: A Process for Classroom/Program Evaluation and Personal/Professional Learning

by Vito Perrone

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Introductions

by Clara A. Pederson

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Vito Perrone
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND THE ERIC SYSTEM CONTRACTORS"

Do You Know

SP011 793

Documentation: A Process for Classroom/Program Evaluation and Personal/Professional Learning

By Vito Perrone
University of North Dakota

An Introductory Statement

In this discussion I wish to comment on documentation as a process for classroom/program evaluation and personal/professional learning. These clearly overlap in a school or classroom context but, for the sake of clarity, they will be addressed separately. The weight of my presentation, however, will fall on documentation and the personal/professional learning of teachers inasmuch as I have discussed on other occasions documentation in relation to classroom/program evaluation.[1]

To discuss documentation as I do here is in part a reaction to some of the "scientific-technological" directions that have come to influence schools and classrooms. More importantly, however, my commentary represents a need to understand more deeply children's varied processes for learning and to examine the ways in which we organize as teachers to respond to such understandings. It is also a reaffirmation that the personal and professional growth of individual teachers is critical to the qualitative improvement of schools.

Documentation as a Process for Classroom/Program Evaluation

Classroom/program evaluation in many settings has come to be dominated by narrow objectives and a variety of standardized tests. The narrow objectives represent a significant threat to the growth of responsive, developmental programs; they also restrict the professional growth of teachers. And standardized tests proliferate, providing teachers and school administrators with little information of consequence. Fortunately, a significant challenge to such a negative direction has emerged.[2] Alternatives are being de-

[1] "Alternatives to Standardized Testing," Insights (April 1976). See the following for excellent discussions of documentation in relation to classroom/program evaluation: Ruth Ann Aldrich, "Innovative Evaluation of Education," Theory Into Practice (February 1974); Ruth Ann Aldrich, Marcy Open School: 1973-74 Goal Evaluation, Minneapolis Public Schools, 1974; Patricia Carini, "Documentation of an Alternative Approach to Program Accountability," Prospect School, North Bennington, VT, 1972; Patricia Carini, Observation & Description: An Alternative Methodology for the Investigation of Human Phenomena, University of North Dakota Press, 1975; Patricia Carini, "Taking Account of Process," Testing and Evaluation: New Views, Association for Childhood Education, 1975; Ann Cook and Herb Mack, The Word & The Thing: Ways of Seeing the Teacher, University of North Dakota Press, 1975; Brenda Engel, Handbook on Documentation, University of North Dakota Press, 1975; Brenda Engel, Evaluation and Documentation of the Cambridge Alternative School, University of North Dakota Press, 1977; Ruth Anne Olson, What's Going on Here: Internal Evaluation Techniques for Teachers, Minneapolis Public Schools, 1976; Sylvia Ross, Herbert Zimiles, David Gerstein, Children's Interactions in Traditional and Nontraditional Classrooms, University of North Dakota Press, 1976.

[2] My purpose is not to get deeply involved with issues relating to standardized testing or the narrow constructs often used to establish program objectives. I did wish, however, to provide a brief context in which to introduce documentation. For additional information on testing and related evaluation concerns see Vito Perrone, "On Standardized Testing & Evaluation," Childhood Education, (October 1976); Vito Perrone, Abuses of Standardized Tests, Phi Delta Kappa Foundation, 1977; Testing and Evaluation: New Views, Association for Childhood Education, 1975; National Elementary Principal (March/April 1975) and (August/September 1975).

veloped. Documentation is basic to that challenge and integral to the alternatives that I, and many of my colleagues, have found useful.

From a philosophical/methodological point of view, documentation stresses the need to get closer to what is happening in a school or in classrooms. The focus is on meaning over time, requiring as Michael Patton suggests, "becoming intimately acquainted with the details of the program . . . looking at not only anticipated outcomes but unanticipated consequences."[3] Brenda Engel provides an excellent operational definition for documentation.

> "A documentation can be described as a selection of documents put together in order to portray a program or event as clearly and truthfully as possible, with its significant elements represented. The documents consist of both samplings and summaries . . . presented in various forms such as accounts, diagrams, graphs, photographs, drawings, schedules, lists, formal assessments, transcribed tapes, etc."[4]

To be useful for purposes of classroom or program evaluation, a documentation effort demands careful planning. It needs to be a systematic process.

What might a group of teachers in a given school wish to look at? What might they view as especially important to document? Answers need to come at the level of the school. For a school as a whole (or particular clusters within a school) to make such decisions is not meant to imply standard record keeping procedures in all areas of every classroom; it does imply some consensus about what areas will be looked at closely by a group of teachers. Where such a consensus exists, individual teachers not only receive the support of their colleagues but also have others with whom to share their documentation and reflection. In documenting the process of learning, teachers in a school might wish to include information about the children's originality, responsibility, initiative and independence of effort. In relation to the content of learning, they might wish to consider materials the children produce (such as writings and drawings); evidence that instruction deals with important concepts as well as necessary skills; and evidence that children find meaning in their learning, that it is not merely rote. And in relation to the context of learning, they might consider the basic human relationships that exist - child to child, child to teacher, and teacher to teacher. The foregoing suggest a variety of record keeping processes. Many, such as concept checklists in math, informal reading inventories, samples of work maintained over time (for example, drawings and photographs), inventories of books read, projects begun and completed, sociograms, curriculum trees, journals, parent, teacher, child interviews and formal observations, among others, are not unfamiliar to teachers. Maintaining the foregoing - or some of the foregoing - systematically and reflecting on it periodically, using it for purposes of evaluation, is less familiar to teachers.

How might a school make a beginning? A brief "case study" might be helpful. I will draw directly (and selectively) from the Documentation of the Enterprise Family School prepared by Chris Evans (an M.Ed. Independent Study, University of North Dakota, 1975).[5]

> During the summer of 1974 I engaged in discussions with University of North Dakota faculty on a process of documenting the Family School. The need was recognized to collect information about the school in a more organized fashion than in previous years. This was seen as important for the school both internally and externally. Careful

[3]Michael Patton, Alternative Evaluation Research Paradigm, University of North Dakota Press, 1975, p. 34.

[4]Brenda Engel, A Handbook on Documentation, University of North Dakota Press, 1975, p. 1.

[5]The Enterprise Family School is an informal school alternative within the Cedar Rapids, Iowa Public School System.

thought was given to how to proceed with the documentation. . . . It was decided by the School's Advisory Board that a Documentation Committee made up of parents and staff be formed. . . . The Documentation Committee met in September and organized the collection of materials into two areas: classroom and general school records. Decisions were made regarding what information would be secured and specific responsibilities were accepted for various areas. The Committee met at two other times during the year to coordinate efforts, make changes and discuss how the information was being used. . . . The broad purposes of this documentation have been two-fold:

1. To allow Family School staff and parents to know the school more completely so that decision-making (planning) could be based on clear information.

2. To describe in detail the school operation in order to communicate (more effectively) with administrative personnel and others interested in the workings of the Family School.

A wide range of documents was maintained including systematic records of individual children's learning, teacher journals, weekly and daily goal statements, anecdotal records, written evaluations prepared for parents, newsletters, field trips, interactions with parents about individual children, advisory council meetings, teacher, child, parent interviews, use of the instructional materials center, parent participation in the classroom, maps of classrooms at various intervals, etc. Document samples and evaluative comments filled out the documentation booklet (247 pages in all).

> This first attempt at documentation was accompanied by frustration, mistakes and a great deal of learning. It is my hope that a similar process be continued . . . Is documentation a reasonable process for evaluation? Being involved in the documentation of our school caused me to reflect deeply upon what was happening in the total school, in my classroom, as well as within myself. I feel I have continually reassessed and changed during the year as a result of this reflection. The documentation has provided a comprehensive written record of the school which can be a basis for informed decision making. It allows others to see more clearly how individual parts of the school relate to the complex whole. The documentation can be read and reread with each reading adding fresh insight to the dynamics of the school. It provides an historical record of the school's development during the 1974-75 year . . . Documentation is a time consuming yet extremely valuable process for evaluation.
>
> What recommendations would I suggest for others . . . I would recommend scheduling times for feedback and reflection based on information collected. One person needs to accept responsibility for the final compilation of the documentation . . . a focus for the documentation should be selected as the school year begins . . . [Too much was attempted.]

What is clear from the documentation prepared at the Enterprise School (in addition to the fact that too much was attempted) is that teachers, parents and school administrators became informed and that a basis was provided for qualitative improvement in all aspects of the school's functioning. Teachers especially learned more about evaluation and about the quality of the learning of the children with whom they were working. The school administration and the school board could finally respond with some authority about the school.

Documentation as a Process for Personal/Professional Learning

The overlap between these two sections, artificially distinct here, should be apparent even before I address the issue of personal/professional learning. It needs to be said early that the personal and professional learning of teachers has been a relatively low priority for schools, becoming in-

creasingly directed in recent years, when attended at all, toward improving techniques, using programs designed by others in a prescribed manner, etc. Such conditions caused Seymour Sarason, in his Culture of The Schools and The Problem of Change (Allyn & Bacon, 1971) to note that teachers, after five years, "felt as competent as they ever were to feel . . . These teachers indicated that they rarely experienced anymore a sense of personal and intellectual growth. The shape of the future was quite clear . . . a routine with which they were already familiar (pp. 163-64)."

Teachers certainly want more from their professional lives than Sarason suggests and if provided reasonable opportunities and professional support would, I believe, maintain their enthusiasm for teaching and continue to be productive learners. Such an outlook is basic to my discussion of documentation as a process for personal and professional learning. To make the point even more explicit, however, I wish to add to the discourse the following two classroom related assumptions:

> The quality of teachers' understandings influences to a large degree what teachers do in the classroom.
>
> The best source for teachers to learn more about teaching and learning, growth and development of children, materials and methods, is through an examination of their own practice and their own classrooms.

John Dewey, who had a good sense of what it meant to be a professional teacher, summed up the foregoing assumptions by suggesting the need for teachers to become "students of teaching." His principal concern was that teachers needed to maintain a reflective capacity in order to grow, to become individuals who were clear about their intentions and capable of making independent judgments about their classrooms.

Anne Bussis and Edward Chittenden make a similar point when they ask "How important is it for teachers to be able to analyze, reflect upon and articulate their basic assumptions about teaching?" Their response is thoughtful and adds even more substance to the importance of documentation processes.

> ... it seems to us that analysis and articulation of the teaching/learning environment are important in at least two respects. First, analysis and articulation are critical components of the teacher's ability to communicate to others; to administrators, to parents, to other teachers (and, in a much more subtle and complex way, to children). . . . But second, and less commonly discussed, analysis would seem important for the teacher's evaluation of his/her own efforts -- especially when things start to go poorly or to stagnate. What conscious frame of reference can the teacher bring to bear in an attempt to analyze what is happening? Can he/she look at the relationship of curricular concerns to surface content ... and begin to sort out priorities? When called for, can teachers examine the woods and not the trees?[6]

Some practical examples of documentation follow. While specific samples of record keeping forms, observation and interview schedules and the like might be useful to teachers, space does not permit their inclusion here. Many of the sources already listed, especially those in Footnote 1, provide a large array of samples.[7]

Ric Hovda, a classroom teacher in Minot, North Dakota notes:

[6]"Teaching/Learning Constructs," a discussion paper prepared May 1974. The theme of teaching/learning constructs in relation to teachers' intentions is examined more intensively in Anne Bussis and Edward Chittenden, Beyond Surface Curriculum, Westview Press, 1976. Beyond Surface Curriculum is an enormously thoughtful book!

[7]See also Clara Pederson, Evaluation and Record Keeping, Informal Education Series, University of North Dakota Press, to be published July 1977).

Not long ago I discovered I could evaluate the teaching and learning in my classroom by using a form of documentation that would assess the learning taking place. One of my former college instructors suggested I begin by just observing the activity in my classroom for short periods of time each day. I made anecdotal records of my observations in a notebook.

I used my notes to make some specific observations about children's activity and their learning. The results were not astounding but the entries helped me to confirm many of the notions I had and also raised some questions.

After making many broad observations . . . I decided to investigate . . . math because that subject was least appealing to the children. I began observing and recording both my activities and the children's . . . my observations indicated an inconsistency between my philosophy and my practice. In spite of my strong belief that manipulative math experiences help children to understand math concepts, I was doing little in the way of teaching with these materials or encouraging their use in independent study . . . [Some new directions were begun.] Since my first attempt as a teacher-researcher, I have continued to experiment with alternative manipulative experiences in math, using a variety of settings and age levels. Through careful observation and recording, I have come to more specific conclusions about the purpose and use of manipulative experiences. Using the same process during the past five years I have also been involved in research on lab approaches to social studies and science, vocabulary development, language experience, parent-child-teacher conferences, values clarification, multi-age grouping, parent meetings. . . .[8]

The theme of the "teacher as researcher" has been developed particularly well by Ann Cook and Herb Mack in The Word & The Thing: Ways of Seeing The Teacher (University of North Dakota Press, 1975).[9] While they suggest the positive role that an outside person - evaluator - might play in assisting a teacher to clarify and redefine, they acknowledge that

> . . . the primary initiative must be taken by the teacher who sees himself as a researcher, developing concrete ideas about needs, planning strategies to effect those needs, and then determining how to document the success and failures of the strategies.[10]

Cook & Mack outlined, as an example, some of the problems that were identified by teachers with whom they were engaged. The problems teachers identified were matched with statements about what the problems were preventing them from doing, another way of defining goals. A selection from the list follows:[11]

Problem

> Children too dependent on the teacher. Come to the teacher to get assistance and grow impatient when others are getting help.

Goal

> This prevents children from relying

[8] Today's Education, (November-December 1976), p. 53.

[9] See also John Elliott, Developing Hypotheses about Classrooms from Teachers' Practical Constructs, University of North Dakota Press, 1976, an important source for any discussion of the "Teacher as Researcher." Another source of assistance is Steve Harlow and John Williams, Action Research in the Classroom, Kendall-Hunt, 1970.

[10] The Word & The Thing, p. 17.

[11] The Word & The Thing, pp. 17-18.

less on the authority of the teacher and from developing the responsibility to follow through on things independently.

Problem

Discussion dominated by certain children - less involvement by other children. Children talking through teacher; not to one another.

Goal

This prevents children from relating to one another and to the group. Children should talk and listen to one another.

In order to address each of the problems, teachers entered into a process of determining how they might gain more understanding of what was occurring. In the case of the concern about dependence, teachers began, among other things, to analyze the types of questions children asked. "The children asked many questions involving where, what, when and how. Few, however, seemed to inquiry why?" This data was gathered by the maintenance of a one week log of children's questions. The hypothesis was established that children would be less inclined to ask the teacher "what do I do now" if they were more accustomed to open-ended questions. They then proceeded to inquire about what kinds of questions they asked children. Did they ask why questions? Were their questions suggestive of many possibilities for genuine investigation on the part of children? I won't pursue this further except to note that the teachers involved found their questions to be quite limited, causing them to formulate new strategies for raising more open-ended questions, etc.. They learned from the process.

In a group with which I was engaged recently we also discussed the importance of questions, believing that why questions were the only ones with any significant potential for extending a child's learning vertically and horizontally. Teachers monitored the questions of children and themselves for a week. To their dismay, where, when and how were overwhelmingly dominant in the classrooms. Did such factors as classroom organization, curriculum and teacher practices have anything to do with this? Materials tended to be stored away in relatively inaccessible places. Books, other than those housed in the school library, were limited in variety and number. Worksheets and workbooks were used in association with almost every learning activity. Teachers were organized into teams with children moving frequently from one teacher to another. Time was tightly scheduled. An analysis of such factors led to a number of initial, though tentative, conclusions: open-ended questions were not encouraged in the circumstances under which they were teaching; the materials in use, demanding, as they did, precise ways of responding encouraged, if anything, questions of where, what, when and how; the reliance of worksheets and workbooks and the tight scheduling put the teacher in a role of giving frequent instructions which tended to be dominated by when, where, what and how; dependence on the teachers in such an environment, as they determined, could hardly be avoided. One could argue that such understandings should be obvious but, to the teachers involved, it became more clear, more understandable when they actually engaged in a systematic process of documentation and analysis.

A concern within another school in which I worked related to "communication with parents." One documentation task in which teachers engaged was a recording of every personal or telephone contact made with parents during a one month period. These were then categorized. Several things emerged: the number of contacts were numerous, averaging almost one per day; most of the contacts initiated by teachers were negative in tone, relating principally to particular children not performing well, being disruptive, etc. Actually recording all of the interactions and stepping back to examine the data was informative and provided teachers an opportunity to discuss the implications. As part of this general area of concern the teachers also brought together all formal written materials sent home to parents for a two month period. The following kinds of questions were asked as the documents were examined: Are the communications personal in tone? Are they informative/educational about what is actually occurring in the classroom? Having all the communications together provided a different view - a broader perspective - than seeing only one or two. A

large share of the communications were not signed by teachers (their names were typed only). Many carried designations such as "Team A teachers" rather than the names of the individual teachers. The communications were dominated - 90% - by announcements about school activities in general (PTA meetings, lunch schedules, reminders to parents to have the children wear boots, etc.); they were not particularly informative about the classroom experiences of the children.

A documentation activity that has provided considerable assistance to a number of teachers involved in programs related to the University of North Dakota makes use of Teacher and Child Interviews developed by staff in the Center for Teaching & Learning. The Teacher Interview provides a context for individual teachers to reflect on their intentions, use of materials, relationships with children, organization of time and space, difficulties, successes, and so on - in other words, the teacher's own perspective of the classroom. The Child Interview provides another important perspective, focusing on such issues as how the child uses materials, pursues learning, understands what is occurring in the classroom, views the teacher and relates to other children. Teachers gain from the use of the interviews an enormous amount of qualitative information, basic to gaining control over what they do, developing hypotheses about their classroom practice, and establishing fresh directions.[12]

A couple of questions from the Teacher Interview and some related activities that we have begun to use with individual teachers in a staff development program might be instructive.

> Draw a sketch of your classroom, outline the materials and resources that are in the room.
>
> a. Why have you organized the space and materials in this way?
>
> b. What reasons do you have for including specific materials?

A teacher might decide to write a statement in relation to the foregoing at various intervals during a year. Writing, we have found, is an enormously constructive process because it can be maintained over time. There are a number of other documentation activities that can be related to this; for example, logs relating to how space is used by children, what materials are used, not used, descriptions of the character of materials being used, whether centers are being employed narrowly or broadly, etc.

> Think about the teaching day you just completed. Take ten minutes and jot down everything you recall about the teaching day.[13]
>
> Now consider the following questions:
>
> What did you do alone?
> What did you do with a few children, with large groups of children, with other teachers?
> Where did you stand/sit most of the time?
> Who was talking? Listening?
> What did you do a little of that you would like to do more of? What prevented you from doing that?
> What did you do a lot of that you would like to have done less of?
> Which of the things you noted reflect a major goal in your teaching?

[12]The interviews, as well as a wide range of suggestions for their use by individual teachers and groups of teachers, are included in The Staff Development Workbook (Center for Teaching & Learning, University of North Dakota). See also, Two Elementary Classrooms: Views from the Teachers, Children and Parents, Kendall-Hunt, 1977; Clara Pederson, Evaluation and Record Keeping, Informal Education Series, University of North Dakota Press, 1977.

[13]In the Interview itself, the question is: "What is a typical teaching day like for you?" In our efforts to assist individual teachers to use the interview question selectively as part of a self-reflection process and not in any way related to program evaluation, we have altered the question.

More teacher interview related questions could be posed but we have found those listed to be particularly helpful places to begin. We have attempted to encourage teachers to engage in such a ten minute writing and follow-up reflection daily for a period of time - a week or a month. The learning potential is high. It is instructive that after a week, teachers tend to write more; they tend, in fact, to become increasingly more observant, more aware of what is happening in the classroom, more able to be precise in their descriptions. They also begin to discuss children's learning with greater intensity, with more understanding. They begin to wonder more, to question many of their long standing practices.

Another variation of the above pattern that has been useful to teachers as part of a long term documentation process is the following:

> Using a scale of 1-10 (worst possible day 1 2 3 ... 10 the best possible day), What was the morning like? What was the afternoon like?
>
> > What contributed to the way you evaluated the day? List the factors, rank them.
>
> At the end of a week, enter into an analysis: What will you do to make your days fall closer to 10 on the scale?

Another starting point for systematic reflection might be for teachers to take a specific activity, one they are trying to understand more deeply, and begin to record for a period of time important details. The specific area might be math or reading. Possible questions are: What happened during the math period? What did you particularly like - dislike about the period? How did the children respond - to the math activities, to you? How did you respond - to the math activities and to the children? Did the activity draw on previous experiences? In what ways?

How well do teachers know individual children? Are children <u>observed</u> rather than "diagnosed?" Do children have opportunities to present themselves over a period of time, in a variety of settings? What patterns emerge in a child's behavior, in his/her responses to particular materials, literature, etc.? What kinds of interests are developing? How do they relate to the child's learning? How can a particular child be supported and his/her learning extended? What fresh resources do I need to bring into the classroom? Teachers have found it useful to engage in a systematic observation of selected children - not just to gain insights about the specific children but to gain broader insights about the variety of ways in which different children enter learning.

So much more could be described. One of the dangers in what has been presented thus far - and one that I am particularly concerned about - is that the activities discussed could easily become tasks to do rather than part of a pattern of thought, a way of getting closer to the activities of the classroom, becoming a "student of teaching" in the Deweyan sense. <u>It is the latter that is critical</u>. While many of the activities discussed in the second part of this paper relate to individual practices, the more collaborative they become, the more they become a base for interaction with others who are also thinking about their teaching, the greater is the potential for growth. Without the kind of growth suggested above, schools will become, I believe, dominated even more by external evaluation and by more behaviorally oriented curricula. In such an environment, teachers will be considered more as technicians than as professional educators capable of collaboration with other teachers and researchers on the development of theory and responsible for the qualitative improvement of schools.